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Correctional Officer Series

GS-0007

CONTENTS

SERIES DEFINITION	1
EXCLUSIONS	1
TITLES	2
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	2
CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA	4
CLASSIFICATION OF SUPERVISORY POSITIONS	4
GRADE-LEVEL COVERAGE	5
HAZARDS IN CORRECTIONAL OFFICER WORK	6
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-06	6
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-07	7
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-08	8
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-09	10

SERIES DEFINITION

This series covers positions involving the correctional treatment, custody, and supervision of criminal offenders in correctional institutions or community-based correctional treatment or rehabilitation facilities. Positions in this series have as their paramount requirement the knowledge and application of correctional skills and techniques.

This revises and supersedes the standard for the Correctional Officer Series issued in February 1963.

EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are:

1. Positions predominantly involving the security and control of criminal offenders in correctional institutions but not having a substantial degree of responsibility for correctional treatment. These positions are classified in the [Guard Series, GS-0085](#).
2. Positions involving responsibility for managing, or participating in the overall management of, correctional institutions or systems, and positions involving responsibility for advising on, reviewing, and evaluating the management of such institutions. (See the [GS-0006 Correctional Institution Administration Series](#) for positions that require knowledge of both penological theories, principles, and techniques and of problems, methods, and techniques of institutional management.)
3. Positions having as their paramount qualification requirement knowledge of specialized subject-matter fields other than corrections, but including as a complementary requirement the custody, supervision, and correctional treatment of inmates. These positions, such as vocational or academic teacher, medical technical assistant, voucher examiner, supply clerk, etc., are classified in the series appropriate to the basic duties and qualifications required of the positions. See the [Guide for the Evaluation of Positions Requiring Collateral Correctional Skills](#) for additional guidelines for evaluating these positions.
4. Positions having as their paramount qualification requirement trade, craft, or manual labor knowledges and skills, but including as a complementary requirement the custody, supervision, and correctional treatment of inmates. Such positions are evaluated in accordance with the provisions of the [Coordinated Federal Wage System](#).

TITLES

The title for all nonsupervisory positions in this occupation is *Correctional Officer*.

The title for supervisory positions is *Supervisory Correctional Officer*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are two major objectives of a correctional system. The first is to safely keep convicted offenders until authorized to release them. The second, and more critical, objective is to attempt to change the undesirable attitudes and behavior patterns of offenders so that, upon release, they will no longer engage in illegal activities.

The staff of correctional officers comprises the largest single group of employees in the correctional system. They have the primary responsibility for meeting the first objective of keeping the inmates safely in custody. They also play a very important role in the treatment and rehabilitative process as well. Several factors have contributed to the increasing involvement of correctional officers in correctional treatment and rehabilitation. The availability of professionally trained treatment specialists has been, and continues to be, very limited. The high ratio of inmates to professional staff minimizes the amount of contact possible between members of the professional staff and individual offenders. On the other hand, correctional officers, because of their close and continuing contact with inmates, have a great impact on the attitudes and behavior of the inmate population. Thus, the correctional force has been identified as a major contributor in the implementation of the broad range of programs necessary in a modern correctional setting.

Correctional officers are involved to some degree in almost every area of institution activity. They are responsible for institution security, inmate conduct and discipline, control of contraband, safety, housekeeping and sanitation. They supervise inmate work details, often in conjunction with the work of other departments such as the Food Service Department, Mechanical Services Department, etc. They assist the Classification and Parole Office by providing oral and written reports concerning the behavior and progress of individual inmates. They provide supporting services for educational, recreational, and religious activities, and in general, become involved in the general operations of the institution.

Because of changes in correctional philosophy, it has become an increasingly prevalent trend for the courts to handle "good risk" offenders by probation or similar means rather than by imprisonment. As a result, a high percentage of inmates in correctional institutions, whether maximum security penitentiaries or minimum security camps, exhibit difficult behavior problems. Correctional practice provides for considerable freedom of movement and expression by inmates within institutions. As a consequence, correctional officers must constantly work with these difficult and dangerous offenders, maintaining control and exerting a correctional influence primarily by reason, strength of character, and acquired correctional skills. There are, of course,

occasions when physical control is necessary, as in the case of fights among inmates, assaults on officers or other staff, and riots or escape attempts. Correctional officers must be prepared to handle this type of situation.

Because of their scope, the tasks performed by correctional officers involve varying degrees of contacts with inmates. Assignments, therefore, differ in the requirement for application of the correctional techniques that are the significant characteristic of the occupation. Some assignments involve primarily security functions, such as those in watch towers, sally ports, school facilities, etc. Other assignments, such as those for quarters officers, work detail supervisors, and admission and orientation unit officers, combine security and housekeeping functions with frequent opportunity to influence the attitudes and behavior of inmates by informal guidance and counseling. Some officers, assigned as correctional counselors in specialized treatment or rehabilitation programs, utilize technical skills acquired through formal training by professionals to provide substantially full-time treatment and counseling services to inmates, with only an incidental requirement for custody and security functions.

Most officers are rotated through various assignments over a period of time. The extent to which they are assigned to the more difficult and responsible posts depends largely on the level of correctional skills and degree of mature judgment demonstrated by the individual officer. While correctional officers are normally assigned to posts selected as those requiring correctional skills commensurate with demonstrated ability, they may, on occasion, be assigned to posts considered to be at a lower or higher level of difficulty. Assignments to more difficult posts provide opportunity for officers to develop and demonstrate the higher level skills required of those assignments. Occasional assignments to posts of lesser difficulty may be necessary to satisfy manpower requirements or to give the officers temporary relief from the pressures inherent in assignments involving continuing and intense contact with inmates.

Therefore, it is the degree of difficulty predominant in the total pattern of assignments that is a major determinant of grade levels of correctional officer positions, rather than that characteristic of one individual post. Whatever the type of post assignment, however, the officers must observe the inmates under their supervision, talk to them, and learn enough about them so that they can help in the inmates' adjustment to the institution and rehabilitation. They attempt to win the respect and cooperation of the inmates to facilitate the control of behavior and to increase the effectiveness of correctional influences.

Correctional officers are not only concerned with offenders within the confines of an institution. Some officers function in programs in which offenders are given the opportunity to participate in community activities. In work release and study release programs, the offenders live within the institution but are allowed to work or attend school in the community. In other pre-release programs, the offenders live in facilities in the community as well as work or study there. Correctional officer assignments in these programs require extensive counseling of offenders in various areas of adjustment, and in addition, varying degrees of contact and coordination with individuals and groups in the community, such as employers, school officials, relatives of the

offenders, etc. Such officers assist the offenders in adapting to the free community by attempting to identify possible problem areas and to provide guidance in their solution. They establish relations with members of the community to gain their cooperation in working with offenders in ways that will provide maximum opportunity for successful rehabilitation.

CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

The classification criteria used in this standard are Nature of Assignment and Level of Responsibility.

Nature of Assignment

This factor covers the type, variety, and difficulty of assignments commonly found in correctional officer positions. Assignments range from on-the-job and classroom training in the fundamentals of correctional work to very difficult work in the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders involving the knowledge and application of technical counseling and treatment techniques in direct support of professional correctional programs. The relative difficulty of assignments depends upon the level of correctional skills required by the range of posts to which the correctional officer is regularly assigned and upon the degree to which the officer possesses and applies these skills in the performance of his assignments.

Level of Responsibility

Level of responsibility measures the kind and degree of supervision received, and the degree of judgment and independence required. Levels range from close, detailed supervision requiring relatively simple judgments to considerable independence of operation in making judgments significantly affecting the rehabilitation of inmates.

CLASSIFICATION OF SUPERVISORY POSITIONS

This standard does not provide evaluation criteria for supervisory correctional officer positions. These positions are too individualized for the development of specific grade-level guidance. Supervisory correctional officers are involved in a variety of diverse operational and treatment programs. Because of the frequent modification of correctional theories and the consequent innovation and experimentation, these programs vary among institutions and, over a period of time, at the same institution. The nature of involvement by supervisory personnel depends largely on the types of programs at a particular institution and the degree to which the supervisor contributes to those programs.

There are two types of supervisory correctional officer positions:

- (1) Those with responsibility for supervising a staff of correctional officers on three shifts and for planning, directing, and administering the security program of a correctional institution; and
- (2) Those with responsibility for the immediate supervision of correctional officers assigned to a single shift or to a physical area or activity of an institution.

To evaluate the program supervisor position (type 1 above), the following factors must be considered:

- (1) The kind and level of supervisory responsibility;
- (2) The kind and level of responsibility for managing the security program; and
- (3) The extent of participation and coordination with other programs of the institution.

To evaluate the shift or area supervisor position, the following factors must be considered:

- (1) The level of responsibility in relation to that of the program supervisor;
- (2) The nature of decisions made while in charge of a shift or activity; and
- (3) The kind and level of supervisory responsibility over subordinate correctional officers.

The "[Supervisory Grade Evaluation Guide, Part I](#)" should be used as a basic guideline in evaluating the supervisory responsibilities of these positions.

GRADE-LEVEL COVERAGE

This standard provides grade-level criteria for nonsupervisory positions in grades GS-6 through GS-9.

The fact that grade GS-6 is described as a developmental level does not preclude the establishment of entry and training positions at lower grade levels. Persons who enter the occupation at grades below GS-6 are given extensive training in basic correctional skills and techniques. Such trainees work under close, detailed, step-by-step instruction, are not expected to make decisions or act in specific situations, and undergo training for an extended period of time before they are advanced to the developmental and full working levels in the occupation.

Some positions have duties and responsibilities that clearly and significantly exceed the criteria in this standard. Such positions are atypical and few in number. They should be classified to the appropriate higher grade by extension of these criteria and the application of sound classification principles.

HAZARDS IN CORRECTIONAL OFFICER WORK

Correctional officers deal continuously with persons who have been imprisoned as punishment for a wide variety of illegal acts. Incidents frequently occur (e.g., fights among inmates, inmate assaults on officers or other employees of the institution, riots, refusal by inmates to follow orders, and escape attempts). Correctional officers have the primary responsibility for controlling such incidents. They must be willing to go to the aid of other employees who have trouble with inmates. Correctional officers must be aware of group or individual tensions, alert to unpredictable behavior, and generally sensitive to signs of trouble. Inmates often assault correctional officers with dangerous weapons. Officers are sometimes held as hostages in riots and attempted escapes, with the possibility of being seriously injured or killed. Correctional officers also conduct escape hunts. Often escaped prisoners are armed and dangerous.

The presence of these hazards require that correctional officers have sufficient alertness, skill, and judgment to avoid unnecessary dangers and to deal effectively with hazardous situations when they arise. The evaluation criteria established in this standard take into account the knowledges, skills, and abilities required by the hazards in this occupation.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-06

Nature of assignment

This is a developmental level. GS-6 correctional officers receive classroom instruction and on-the-job training in the philosophy, methods, and techniques of corrections and of the correctional officer's role within the correctional system. Formal instruction includes such topics as: nature and purpose of correctional institutions; institutional organization; human behavior and interpersonal relations; standards of conduct; security requirements; legal requirements regarding the rights of inmates and the collection and preservation of evidence for use in court proceedings; etc. On-the-job training includes rotational assignments to various posts to observe and put into practice the methods and techniques learned in the orientation. Initial assignments are typically to posts with a minimum of contact with inmates. As correctional officers gain experience and confidence, assignments are expanded to include direct custody and supervision of inmate groups.

Level of responsibility

GS-6 correctional officers typically work with officers of higher grade during the initial training period. They receive specific instructions on tasks to be performed, and work is reviewed frequently to ensure compliance with instructions and good correctional practice. As training progresses, GS-6 officers work on the less difficult posts with only intermittent supervision. Their performance on posts requiring greater correctional skills is closely reviewed to provide additional guidance and to correct mistakes. However, they must exercise a good deal of judgment in

contacts with inmates to maintain a healthy correctional atmosphere and avoid creating unnecessary hostility among potentially dangerous offenders by careless words or actions.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-07

Nature of assignment

In comparison with GS-6 correctional officers who receive on-the-job training in the various post assignments, Correctional Officers GS-7 independently perform, typically on a rotational basis, a variety of moderately difficult assignments. Such assignments require proficiency in the application of correctional skills in supervising inmate activities on work details, in recreational activities, in living quarters during morning or day watches, etc. These assignments involve regular contacts with individual or small groups of inmates. They allow significant opportunity for correctional officers to motivate inmates to acceptable behavior. The assignments involve advising and counseling inmates regarding adjustment to institution life, resolution of personal problems, and acceptance of professional assistance in the rehabilitative process.

The following are examples of GS-7 correctional officer assignments (these examples are illustrative of grade-level concepts and are not intended to limit the types of assignments at the GS-7 level):

1. Immediate supervision of small (e.g., 10 inmates) work details such as grounds maintenance, road building, etc.;
2. Direct supervision of inmates in living quarters during the day watch where the number of inmates at any one time is small, or on the morning watch when the inmates either are sleeping or have prescribed activities;
3. Supervision of groups of inmates during outside activities, e.g., recreation, free time, etc., when the situation allows officer-inmate contacts on a regular basis.

Correctional Officers GS-7 also participate with officers of higher grade in performing such assignments as supervising large work details, supervising inmates in living quarters on the evening watch, and performing admission and orientation functions.

Level of responsibility

The GS-7 correctional officer performs assignments of the difficulty described above with considerable independence, whereas the Correctional Officer GS-6 receives close supervision in performing most assignments. GS-7 officers get their assignments from posted schedules and the general requirements of each assignment is described in written post orders. After receiving available daily information as to known problems that may be encountered, GS-7 correctional

officers perform their assigned duties with little supervision on all but the most difficult posts. Their work is checked by occasional visits by a supervisory correctional officer who is also always available by telephone for assistance in unusual situations. The supervisor evaluates performance from oral and written reports and recommendations submitted by the GS-7 officer and from results achieved in a wide range of correctional assignments.

When assigned to posts presenting exceptionally difficult correctional problems (e.g., quarters on evening watch, admission and orientation unit), the GS-7 correctional officer frequently works with a correctional officer of higher grade who is immediately available for advice and assistance on unusual problems. However the GS-7 officer is expected to handle most situations on his own.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-08

Nature of assignment

GS-8 correctional officers regularly perform a variety of very difficult assignments in a correctional institution. Such assignments, based on the recognition of superior correctional skills of the incumbent, require the judgment, maturity, and knowledge of inmate behavior developed through experience gained in a wide variety of assignments.

GS-8 correctional officers typically supervise groups of inmates in situations that are critical to the effectiveness of the correctional treatment program and to the efficient operation of the institution. Assignments involve contacts with inmates that present substantially continuous opportunity for the officer to use his extensive experience and superior correctional skills and abilities in influencing the attitudes and motivation of offenders towards socially acceptable behavior and in adapting to the institution environment and rehabilitation programs.

The following are examples of GS-8 correctional officer assignments (these examples are illustrative of grade-level concepts and are not intended to limit the types of assignments at the GS-8 level):

1. Custody of newly committed offenders with responsibility for developing information through interview and observation and making recommendations regarding quarters assignments, work assignments, security classification, and individual program goals. The officer gives inmates a complete orientation in the procedures and expectations of the institution. This initial contact between an inmate and the correctional force is vital in influencing the offender's behavior and rehabilitation during his entire stay at the institution.
2. Direct responsibility for supervising the activities of inmates in quarters during the evening period when he must effectively control a large group under relaxed, less regulated conditions. In some instances, he is assisted by one or two correctional officers of lower grade. In

addition to encouraging constructive activities and maintaining discipline and security, the GS-8 correctional officer uses the relaxed atmosphere to talk with individuals and small groups to resolve problems, to stimulate cooperation, and to establish positive correctional attitudes.

3. Coordination of work release and/or study release programs with responsibility for making satisfactory arrangements for meeting the needs of inmates while outside the institution, such as finances, transportation, etc.; maintaining contacts with employers to be aware of problems that may develop; and counseling inmates on any work, school, or personal problems that might complicate the offender's rehabilitation.
4. Direct responsibility for supervising inmates with particularly serious behavior problems (e.g., assaultive, unmanageable, deviant sexual behavior) who are in a segregation status. The officer has the opportunity, because of the lack of mobility of the inmates, to spend considerable time in attempting to recognize and understand their correctional problems. He helps them understand the undesirability of their behavior and the advantages of more acceptable attitudes, and generally attempts to create and maintain a correctional, rather than a punitive, atmosphere.

Level of responsibility

Correctional Officers GS-8 work with a great deal of independence in performing very difficult assignments. They utilize superior skill and insight in observing and interpreting inmate activities, making sound decisions rapidly, and resolving difficult correctional problems. This contrasts with the situation at GS-7 which involves working with a correctional officer of higher grade when assigned to a difficult post. GS-8 officers usually receive only general instructions as to the purpose of the assignment. Because of their recognized ability, correctional supervisors and other institutional staff (i.e., social workers (case workers), psychologists, teachers, etc.) give considerable weight to the officers' reports and recommendations on inmate behavior and operational procedures.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, GS-0007-09

Nature of assignment

Correctional Officers GS-9 perform functions requiring the application of technical treatment and/or counseling skills and techniques acquired through formal and supervised practical training. These skills and techniques are normally associated with services provided by professionals in social work or the behavioral sciences. However, the GS-9 correctional officer applies a practical knowledge of the specific techniques under the guidance of professional workers, without the broad theoretical knowledges and insights acquired through professional education and training. In comparison, the GS-8 correctional officer attempts to influence the attitudes of offenders

towards acceptable behavior using correctional skills developed through personal experience and concentrated training in dealing with offenders, rather than by the use of more formalized methods.

Assignments at this level are typically in direct support of structured treatment or rehabilitation programs. They may be in a correctional institution or in a correctional setting outside the institution, such as a community treatment center. Working within the framework of program goals and methodology established by professional workers, the GS-9 officer applies these techniques and his extensive correctional experience to establish effective communication with the offender and help him recognize and resolve problems relating to himself, his family, and the community environment. He aids the inmate to appraise his problems realistically and to understand and accept his limitations and capabilities. In some situations, the GS-9 officer also deals with individuals outside the correctional system, such as teachers, supervisors, family, etc., to identify further problems and enlist their aid in resolving them.

The following are examples of GS-9 correctional officer assignments (these examples are illustrative of grade-level concepts and are not intended to limit the types of assignments at the GS-9 level):

1. Serves as a correctional counselor in a specialized treatment program for inmates addicted to narcotics. As a full member of the treatment team, the GS-9 officer makes recommendations and participates in decisions concerning the operation of the treatment program. He conducts group therapy sessions, dormitory and community meetings, self-help sessions, or other formal activities required by the particular program. He works with an assigned caseload of individual inmates to provide a variety of services. These services include individual counseling on problems confronting offenders in general, and addicts in particular; writing or assisting inmates in writing correspondence; arranging for special visits outside the institution, such as emergency home visits; approving visitor and correspondence lists; etc. Serves as liaison between treatment program staff and other institutional staff members (i. e., correctional force, educational, vocational, etc.) to provide detailed information on problems concerning individual inmates who are included in his caseload. In performing these duties, the GS-9 correctional officer uses the skills and techniques learned from classroom and supervised practical training by professional psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers in such areas as group counseling techniques, "Therapeutic Community" techniques, transactional analysis, reality therapy, sensitivity training, and personal interviewing.
2. Serves as a counselor in a Community Treatment Center providing a program of rehabilitation and reintegration into the free community. In this setting, GS-9 correctional officers are typically assigned a caseload of offenders for which they provide counseling and assistance on a wide range of problems, under the general guidance of the Center Director and/or professional social worker. The work involves such functions as obtaining background information through personal interview; explaining the services that the Center can provide; counseling offenders (and their families when available) on work, family, personal adjustment

and other problems; referring offenders to sources of additional help in the community; maintaining contacts with employers to attempt to resolve problems before they interfere with the offenders' progress; and conducting group discussions among residents of the Center on common difficulties encountered in the free community and the ways in which to deal with these difficulties and overcome them. GS-9 correctional officers in this type of assignment utilize a knowledge of behavioral characteristics of offenders developed through extensive experience in working with and counseling inmates. In addition, they apply counseling techniques and a knowledge of community resources attained through formalized training and practical experience under the guidance and supervision of professional social workers.

Level of responsibility

Correctional Officers GS-9 exercise independent judgment in performing the day-to-day counseling and treatment assignments. While GS-8 officers work from post orders that specify many of the tasks to be performed, GS-9 correctional officers have a considerable latitude for judgment within the framework of the basic program policy, because of the individualized attention given each offender. Much of the individual counseling and other direct involvement with offenders and others connected with the program is subject to review only in terms of overall results. Social workers, psychologists, etc., are normally available for guidance in unusual or complex situations that require professional knowledges to determine the best approach for further action.